7.
"Hopefully He Puts the Ring On It"

Teenage Mothers' Voiced Desire for Marriage

SARAH BEKAERT

WHILE I WAS INTERVIEWING teenage mothers in East London to explore the social and cultural context of their pregnancy decision making, the young women voiced a keen desire for marriage. However, this goal stood in tension to the reality of their lives, evident in their narratives, which attested to the effectiveness of creative family formations-but not marriage. In these narratives, the young mothers presented a positive account of their "baby father's" involvement in their family life despite his financial, emotional, and childcare support being sporadic. All stressed the committed nature of their relationships, which countered the stereotype of the absent young father. In an astute move by the young women, it seemed that by valuing what the young men do rather than lamenting what they do not do, they keep the young father close and promote the growth of their new family. However, despite this early, and in my opinion, exciting, creative challenge to the stereotypical nuclear family model, all the young mothers expressed a desire for the traditional: marriage and living as a nuclear family unit. A simple desire to marry and/or practical considerations to ensure the young father's continued support may be a contributing factor to this voiced goal; however, I will consider how pressure to prove themselves as a "good citizen" (Kidger 490) in response to social stigma regarding teenage parenthood, may also push them toward expressing a desire for marriage.

Through eight in-depth interviews with young mothers, or mothers to be, who had previously had an abortion, this exploratory study examined the influencing factors on pregnancy decision making in relation to becoming a mother soon after an abortion while in the teenage years. The study considered these factors in a UK context; however, the findings may be relevant to other international contexts with similar societal expectations for motherhood and childhood. These contexts might be those that favour the scholarization of the child (Mayall, "The Sociology" 250); where young people spend increasing time in education in preparation for the workplace. This supposedly precludes motherhood in the teen years, which is assumed to hinder this expected trajectory. Family-formation expectations to be within a financially supportive nuclear family unit also exist; this model is assumed to make no financial demands on the state and is therefore favoured by government and popular opinion (Craig and O'Dell). This narrow view of what family should look like ignores positive aspects of varied family formation-such as extended family supporting the new mother or apprenticeship in which the early parenthood years are spent with the grandparents, and the new parents learn to parent with support close at hand.

My research questions evolved from my growing unease with the assumptions and goals of the UK's Teenaged Pregnancy Strategy, which focused on reducing teenage pregnancy. The government viewed young parenthood as leading to social exclusion and poverty. The policy constructed teenage pregnancy and parenthood as a risk to be fixed through appropriate intervention. I had become increasingly unsettled by the risk discourse surrounding young parenthood through meeting many young mothers who were successfully parenting, and through noting how parenthood could mark a positive change in their lifestyle. Similarly, research attests to teenage parenthood as frequently positive and restorative. Teenage parenthood can lead to reengagement with education (Theriot et al. 355; SmithBattle, "Teenage" 35); a restoration of relationships with family (Furstenberg 79; Bassey-Etowa 32); and withdrawing from negative lifestyles (Kaye et al. 182). Furthermore, motherhood can be experienced as a valued social role (Phoenix 119). In poorer socioeconomic environments in which career opportunities are few, the responsibility of raising children gives young women a recognized role. The "transgression" of becoming pregnant in the teen years is forgotten as the importance of a mother's responsibility in

providing a positive environment for their child takes precedence. There are, without doubt, challenges inherent to young or early motherhood, highlighted most recently in the report by the Young Women's Trust, which notes such issues as poverty, isolation, poor experience with employers, and the prohibitive cost of childcare. However, the same report highlights that young mothers' main challenge is negative judgment because of their age. The terms "young" mother or "early" motherhood are troublesome in themselves. They suggest a right timing for motherhood against which the young mother falls short. Pam Alldred has noted that although media is rife with judgement regarding the wrong time to have a child, it is less clear when the supposed right time may be. The difficulties encountered by young mothers tend to be rooted in dominant popularized psychological and social discourses that find the young mothers wanting.

Deficit psychological models are mobilized to suggest that young mothers are not yet adult-such as teenage egocentrism purported by Elkind (1025)-and are, therefore, unprepared for parenthood (Garcia Coll and Vazquez Garcfa 283). Erica Burman has critiqued deficit psychological models of child development that suggest that children are adults in waiting, and Gerison Lansdown has suggested considering the "capacities of the child" based on social context and life experience (3). Lee Smith Battle has proposed that young mothers may have developmental needs, but this growth can occur through having a child ("Teenage" 22). More specifically in relation to being able to care for their children, Arlene Geronimus has noted that previous childcare work has shown to have better prepared young mothers for motherhood ("What" 323).

Berry Mayall has discussed how young people are viewed as "socialization projects" in preparation for full participation in society ("Understanding" 313). Consequently, further assumptions are levied against young mothers: they have not completed education and, therefore, are not ready for the workplace and assumed financial independence; they are often neither cohabiting nor married to their partner and, thus, are drawing on scant governmental resources. However, these assumptions are often unfounded. Ann Phoenix has noted the financial astuteness of

the young mothers she interviewed; the young women decided to parent at a time when it would have the least financial impact on their lives. Maximizing on extended family support, when available, is also a consideration in the face of high childcare costs (Smith Battle, "Intergenerational" 56). Assumptions about single-parent status are also often erroneous; Simon Duncan et has noted that many young parents are "living apart together": the fathers support the family even though they do not live in the same residence. **In** summary, there is significant evidence that the actuality of young mothers' lives often stands in contrast to the negative picture drawn by policy and popular opinion.

I had been working as lead nurse in a young people's clinic in Hackney, East London. This service was instrumental in trying to achieve government targets to reduce teenage pregnancy rates locally over the ten-year duration of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. As part of the local plan, an assertive outreach pathway to reduce repeat pregnancy among young women who had a pregnancy in their teenage years was piloted by the community teenage health service. An audit of this pathway, while indicating the effectiveness of the pathway overall, also highlighted a small group of young women who became pregnant, had an abortion, then became a parent within two years of the first pregnancy. Commissioners saw these young women as "hard to reach" and a "failure" of our outreach attempts. The phenomenon was also a conundrum for practitioners. I wished to follow this thread, not so much to contribute to a reduction in the teenage pregnancy rates, but to explore what appears to be a mismatch in the young women's decisions-deciding to abort the first pregnancy yet to carry on with a subsequent pregnancy despite still being in their teenage years.

Teenage parenthood in the UK sits within a general trend toward delayed fertility, a consequence of which is that younger pregnancy becomes more noticeable. Also, as mentioned above, teenage mothers are often assumed to be single, yet many are in an ongoing relationship with the baby's father but not necessarily married or cohabiting. In this way, they reflect relationship trends across the age range. According to the latest figures from the UK Office of National Statistics, marriage is becoming less popular

in the UK-just over half of parents registering a child's birth are married. Far fewer couples marry in the younger age groups; nearly all twenty-year-old, or younger, respondents registering a birth were unmarried. In contrast to this, however, there have been increasing numbers of joint birth registrations by both mother and father, which suggests a committed parenting relationship but not necessarily marriage. Andrew Cherlin has observed the deinstitutionalization of marriage over recent decades, which has contributed to its declining popularity (849). With women's increasing participation in the workforce, the clear division between breadwinner and homemaker has changed and the practical importance of marriage has declined-the decision to marry becoming more an act of personal choice and self-development. Furthermore, childbearing outside of marriage has become increasingly acceptable.

Contemporary policy constructs teenage mothers within a discourse of social exclusion and marginalization, requiring action and intervention to solve the problem of teenage pregnancy, yet young women's accounts demonstrate a different story. Young women might have a wealth of childcare experience rather than being unprepared for parenthood (Geronimus, "Clashes" 322; Bennett-Murphy 300). Early parenthood does not necessarily lead to disengagement with school, as this lack of engagement often exists before the pregnancy (SmithBattle, "Teenage" 23). In fact, becoming a parent often encourages a reengagement with education to raise the chances of finding a better-paid job (SmithBattle, "Teenage" 30; Tabberer et al. 23), or to be a role model for their children. One of the young mothers in this study wanted to train as a midwife, saying; "I don't want her [daughter] to be like, oh my mum she doesn't do anything with her life." Similarly, young parenthood does not lead to poverty; a life lived in poverty tends to preexist the pregnancy (Geronimus, "Teenage" 466; SmithBattle, "Teenage" 29). Overall, the literature attests to teenage parenthood as a frequently positive and restorative event that represents inclusion rather than exclusion.

My methodological approach to exploring young women's pregnancy decisions was based around exploring the social structures and cultural contexts that shape young people's and young parents' lives and to focus on where resistance may be present in response to these expectations. I took a social constructionist stance to this research: we, and our narratives, are shaped by the social structures and cultural contexts in which we live. I have drawn on Foucauldian thought regarding power in society, personal interaction, and management of self. In *The History of Sexuality,* Foucault observes how sovereign power, that of a monarch for example, has been devolved and is executed and negotiated by agents of the state (136). Expanding on this concept in *Security, Territory, and Population,* he identifies government agents as a devolved form of state power, which he calls "biopower" (108). These could include social care and health practitioners. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault draws on Bentham's panopticon prison as an illustration, where inmates self-regulate, since their behaviour is being monitored at all times; in a similar way, he suggests that we modify personal behavior in respect of state norms (202-3). I suggest that this theory has had resonance for this study in how the young women narrated their accounts to me-a nurse researcher and state employee-and in relation to expected norms for the teenage years and from the recent Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. Foucault suggests that people negotiate power at these "capillaries" in a relationship of equality; however, women, mothers and children, despite recent rights movements, are not in a position of equal power in society. Therefore, I have also drawn on the work of feminist thinkers who have critiqued Foucault's assumption of equal power negotiation with regard to women (Hartsock 24; Deveaux 223) and children's disempowerment (Burman 67; Mayall, "Understanding" 313). The young women taking part in this study are women, mothers, and teenagers-a considerable intersection of marginalization.

This social constructionist stance is reflected in a narrative inquiry approach that recognizes that people's narratives are "historically, culturally and linguistically mediated" (Willig 7). I used the listening guide as data analysis method (Gilligan 71; Mauthner and Doucet 419). The listening guide reflects a relational ontology and a feminist reflexive methodology. It sits within a narrative framework and entails layered readings of transcripts focusing on the personal, interpersonal, and social structures and cultural contexts within the young women's stories.

In this dialectic, I first discuss how the young women presented the fathers in a positive light by emphasizing their commitment to the young women and the child. I suggest that offering positive feedback to the young fathers encouraged their continued support in the future. This was a proactive approach to strengthening their family for now and in the future. I then explore the young couples' creative family formation and the strengths and limitations of these ways of operating as a family. I then discuss how, despite successful creative family formation and their exploring of new ways of commitment within a relationship, the young women's narratives attested to a desire for a nuclear family and, ultimately, marriage. I theorize on the motivation for these desires, which I suggest may be a consequence of trying to avoid the current stigma associated with teenage pregnancy.

PRESENTING THE GOOD FATHER

The mothers were keen to present a positive account of the fathers' involvement in the child's life. All stressed the committed nature of the relationship, countering the stereotype of the absent young father. I suggest that this was an astute move by the young women, taking what David Dollahite et al. would call an assets rather than a deficit approach to the young fathers' involvement. By valuing and encouraging what the fathers do provide rather than lamenting what they did not, the young women kept the fathers close and promoted the growth of their new family. For example, Danielle[1] was full of praise for her partner who provided for her material needs while she was pregnant:

> Danielle: Yeah he's a brilliant dad like I must say cause I thought he would be like a typical dad. He's not... He looks after her, provides for her, and provides .... He's a good guy. He's a really good dad ... If I say to him, I haven't got no money, he'll say how much do you need? Or whatever, and he'll give me money or he'll buy me. When I was pregnant, I said I ain't got no clothes cause obviously my belly was big he gave me money for clothes and stuff so he was, at the end of the day, he's been really good.

Susannah stressed how her partner was willing to take full responsibility for childcare while she finished school: "So eventually when we decided on it, we decided that if anything once I've had the baby he'll stay at home with the baby full-time while I'm at school, and then I would have the baby in the evening and he can do what he can do."

Mai's partner also seemed keen to get work and sort out their finances in preparation for their child's arrival: "He's sorted his money out; he wants to pay for my ... he wants to pay for me to get a car, pay for my theory [driving lessons] and that, because he says he doesn't want his child on a bus so he wants to pay for everything."

These women highlighted the various ways that fathers were involved in family life, including financial, emotional, childcare, and other practical support. The ways the young women voiced their satisfaction with their partners' involvement showed how they valued a range of participation beyond the purely financial. The financial provision by fathers for their children has recently been a topic of intense debate in the UK, which has been linked to political concerns over single motherhood and the consequent supposed financial impact on government funds. The Child Support Act and Agency was introduced in 1991 to ensure that absent parents contributed financially to the upbringing of their children. Alldred has discussed how this was a problematic move-for example, it can force contact with violent ex-partners. It also defines fatherhood in biological terms and casts its primary responsibility as financial (Alldred 100). As the dominant discourse for fathers was understood as an economic one, other ways of being in relationship with their children remained unarticulated.

According to the young women's accounts in this study, fatherhood seemed to be a catalyst for change in the young men's lives in the same way as it had been for them. The young men expressed a desire to be a role model for their child, to change negative behaviours, and to reengage with education and work. Three of the young women described how the news that their partners were to become fathers prompted the young men's withdrawal from gang involvement, although, as Sandra's words indicate, this was not without risk: "Before he used to do gang things, but now he's

come out of it, but you see when you come out of it, not everybody knows."

Mai described how her partner had left gang life and was now focused on finding work to provide for his new family: "Now he's on a course and apparently not many people got onto the course but he managed to get onto it because he passed the [entrance] test. He got a job interview this morning." Angelique's partner, as another example, was ready to leave his criminal background behind and start afresh: "He's like I'm going to change and he needs someone to support him and stuff."

Dollahite et al. critique the literature on deficit perspectives to fatherhood for overemphasizing fathers' inadequacies and ignoring their strengths. Similar to the findings in this study, other research highlights the positive involvement of young fathers. Linda Davies et al. challenge the stereotype of the absent or irresponsible teenage father; they observe that some contribute money or resources, provide regular or intermittent childcare, and have consistent or periodic contact with their children. The young mothers in a study by LaRon Nelson et al. thought a father's presence is in the best interests of the child, with less emphasis on provision of material resources. Dollahite et al's strengths-based view of fathering counters a deficit approach to fathers' involvement in their children's lives, which they have suggested is too focused on social roles such as provider and breadwinner rather than on facilitating personal transformation into fatherhood. A deficit approach ignores that most fathers have strong desires and motivations to be a good father-illustrated in the examples above-and creates barriers to change by maintaining low expectations for fathers.

An "assets" view of fatherhood, however, does not excuse a father's poor involvement in his child's life. It does, however, facilitate a critical examination of what this involvement should and could be. In previous generations, the fatherhood ideal was to be supportive in family life but not necessarily be directly involved, act as gender role model, and be a distant breadwinner. Currently, there are high expectations of men's involvement in the everyday lives of their children. The constantly evolving approach to parenting and what might be the ideal is a ripe area for discussion; however, in relation to this study, it is society's focus on fathers' apparent failings rather than their positive contributions to family life that I wish to debate and challenge.

Most of the women in this study presented their child's father in a positive light, considering a range of benefits over and above the breadwinner or co-parent role. Perhaps, by encouraging the father's involvement, the young mother avoids the stigma of being seen as a single teenage mother, consequently increasing her self-esteem. Having an affiliation with a man may also be protective and offer a sense of security, which could relate to the uncertain social contexts in which the young women live-where violence is a real possibility. This is evident in the words of Ally, whose partner often accompanies her to the metro station for work:

> but you don't want to go walking around at 4:30 in the morning and see them [men] there because it is scary. Because sometimes the man won't think "oh she's pregnant" ... being round this area now, cause I'm going to get raped or stabbed or someone taking my phone ... I don't actually walk with my bag sometimes when I'm going work and I know that my boyfriend is not here to walk me down ...cause if I'm staying out earlier I always ask him to come and stay over and walk me down the next day.

This sense of security provided by their partner is also illustrated in Angelique's choice of a partner with a violent criminal background. He provided protection from her unpredictable, violent ex-partner and her brother, who was physically threatening to her in the past. Having a strong partner ensures that violence from these perpetrators was kept at bay. When she described her new partner it is more as a foil to stop her violent ex-partner getting to her than his positive attributes:

> But now even though I have love for him [ex-partner] a little bit, I don't love him or feel that thing I had before, because I've got something else to love ... that love has gone to [new partner! and my unborn baby. Yeah like he's

different; he's so different. So I just want to get away from [ex-partner] really. And like now he can't text me and stuff.

Overall, the young women focused on the father's material, practical, and emotional support, playing down any negative aspects, such as a criminal history. This might be an attempt to normalize their family arrangements by stressing that they are a two-parent family. Here, I foreground how the young women take an assets approach to the fathers' involvement. The young women were accepting of, and even celebrated, the level of provision the young men can offer. As a consequence, the young women facilitated a similar transformation and growth through parenthood for the young fathers that they described having experienced for themselves. This facilitative approach was conducive to the growth of positive family relations and demonstrated new ways of showing commitment and being a family.

CREATIVE FAMILY FORMATION

Several of the young women desired living as a nuclear family unit with their child's father and their child. Sandra was adamant that she would not be able to move her life onto the "next chapter" if she could not secure a council property for her, her partner, and their child to live in:

> Like right now, with me right now, I ain't got a house and it's like this is the biggest thing. I need my house, to give, to have a little time and be sorted out and everything. And then move onto the next chapter. If I don't have my house, I'll feel like I'm still on the same chapter.

Despite being a little nervous about how things might work out, Angelique and her partner had their names jointly on the housing list to move in together:

> Cos I told him that if we live together one of us has to come off the housing list, and we can't ever go separate again. Do you understand what I mean? So we're together now as partners in the housing. So we might as well do what we have to do. And if we feel comfortable living together then we'll do it. Cos we're first timers.

In Mai's relationship, it was her partner who is keen for her to apply for housing: "The day of the [pregnancy] scan he come here and was filling out job applications on my laptop and was telling me yeah I need to go get a job ... that he's on to me about getting a job, and going housing [going to the Housing Department of Social Services]."

The young women's narratives reflected desires for nuclear family living, likely perceived as the norm for family living, although many families live in a non-nuclear arrangement. Despite the demise of the nuclear family, politicians have tended to focus on its reestablishment because it is assumed to make no financial demands on the state, as one or both parents usually work (Craig and O'Dell). However, Kelly Musick and Ann Meier argue that a two-parent family is no guarantee of a healthy, financially independent unit. It may also be that these young parents prefer this arrangement, as it marks a final move away from parents and toward independence, autonomy, and perceived maturity.

Although moving toward a nuclear family arrangement is a legitimate desire for the young parents, it does little to acknowledge their successful and creative alternative family arrangements. None of the young women I interviewed were living as a nuclear family. Several were living with their parents. Some were in their own accommodation through being in the Leaving Care System, in which young people who have been in care are entitled to their own accommodation from the age of eighteen. Although the majority of the young fathers were supportive and involved, none were permanently living with their partner.

Interestingly, the three young women who had already had their babies were all either living with family members, or they were very close by. They drew on the support of parents both for advice and practical support. Sandra was acutely aware that she could not live the life she had, where she could meet with friends and have a social life, "without the help of my parents." Danielle also recognized how her mother's support enabled her to have

free time in the evening: "she helps out like every time she comes home she takes her [daughter]." Cadeen had her own place and had requested a flat very close to her mother. She was reconciled with her mother since having a child, and they spent a lot of time together: "Yeah, because I've matured and she's like I'm a big girl now and she has to respect that."

This more fluid approach to family formation reflects varied models evident in the literature pertaining to teenage parenting. For example, an apprenticeship approach is when the young woman remains with her family in a safe and nurturing environment and learns the motherhood role with the close support of her family (Fursten berg 78; Burton 124;SmithBattle, "Intergenerati on" 60); or the extended family model is when childrearing is shared by family members, usually the maternal grandmother (Fursten berg 78; Geronimus, "What" 337; Owen et al. 302). There is also the visiting relationship in which the children's father does not live with the mother and child but supports the family in terms of childcare and finances, and is in a relationship with the mother (Clarke 61).

The apprenticeship approach can be positive in that it gives protection to the young mother so that she does not face all the realities of adulthood in one sudden transition (Apfel and Seitz 424). However, this approach can exclude the young fathers from the emerging family. In this arrangement, young fathers have to negotiate the approval of the mother's parents and the changing relationship with the mother, as well as their own feelings about fatherhood. This may explain why a couple of the young women's partners were keen to apply for social housing for their new family unit, so they no longer had to negotiate their baby's maternal grandmother on a day to day basis. For some young fathers, the challenge of negotiating access and involvement with his new family may be too difficult and they may withdraw from day-to-day contact.

Another tension exists within the apprenticeship approach. Sharon Tabberer et al. have noted that although grandparent support is welcome, it could also engender continued dependence on the family of origin. Ironically, the help offered may keep young mothers dependent on their families and prevent them making the transition to adulthood in the same way as other teenagers. A lack of social housing stock in recent years, a particular issue in the UK, may perpetuate this problem, as it is difficult for young parents to continue their parenting as a nuclear family unit if that is desired.

The visiting relationship model describes unmarried couples living in separate households (Clarke 61). The rights and responsibilities of these unions are ill-defined but are usually shouldered by the mother. Jean Clarke has also stated that typically in visiting unions, the man is already married. A variation of the visiting relationship can be seen in several of the young women's relationships. None of the partners were married, but several of the young women were accepting of their partners having relationships with other women. In a field note regarding a discussion with one of the young women, when the interview had finished and the recording stopped, Danielle spoke about her partner's probable recent unfaithfulness. She explained how she had been contacted on Facebook by a female friend who said Danielle's partner had slept with someone else. When she confronted him with this, he admitted it, but said that he had been drunk and had not really done anything. Although she was not convinced, she said she was prepared to put this aside considering how long they had been together.

Susannah described how her relationship with her partner cooled after her first miscarriage, although she said their relationship was never officially over. During this time, he had a relationship with another girl and fathered a child with her.

> Interviewer: So how long were you not together?
> Susannah: We weren't together for about six months. Cause after I had the miscarriage things were a bit rocky, and I think that's where it all kicked off from. So we weren't talking as much.
> Interviewer: "So does that mean that you weren't together. Did you actually say "right, we're not together?"
> Susannah: No, we just weren't seeing as much of each other. And then I think I heard that he was going out and being with other girls so I was like fine if you want to do that go ahead but I don't want to be part of it....He's got

a daughter already from a previous relationship. She's two.
Interviewer: Okay, so that happened while you were on a break?
Susannah: Yeah.

Shonda's partner also had a relationship with another girl, which prompted a violent reaction from Shonda. However, despite this, she seemed resigned to being together forever as a couple: "We're on good terms now but because so much has happened in the space of time, so many things. It's like, it's hard to get rid of him."

The young women seemed to value their partner's commitment to them through emotional support, material provision or time, which overrode sexual fidelity or exclusivity as the mother of his child. It may be that the young women ascribed less importance to faithfulness in relationships, and demonstrated a constructive approach to building family. Instead of driving fathers away through accusation and rule setting, and by responding positively to what they did provide, they drew in their support, which was more effective for family building.

This more fluid approach to family formation challenges policymakers and many professionals who favour the nuclear family arrangement. Carol Smart has explored a more fluid approach to emotional commitment beyond the waning institution of marriage. She suggests an understanding of family as a "range of flexible practices" rather than as an institution (Smart 25). She does, however, focus on the concept that within this range of flexible practices, there is a sense in which commitment has to start somewhere, but this is not always with marriage. She reflects that some couples choose a precise moment for a ceremony that could be recognized by the family or community, and this may be marriage; however, there are other moments at which commitment can be said to have started-for example moving in together (Smart 71). Susannah recalled the time her mother talked with both Susannah and her partner about their plans for a family holiday and its significance as a marker for him joining the family:

Her [mother] main concern was meeting my boyfriend properly because I was always "oh mum this is my friend," sort of. So when she met him, they've had their talk. I just made sure I was just like out of the room, and then the same day he met my aunty and my cousin, so when the little ones like someone they like someone. I knew that was a good sign. My mum seems to like him ... so at least she likes him. My aunty likes him. So we were planning a trip to go away for the weekend and they all invited him as well, so....

In relation to these young women's narratives, I suggest that having a child together, or having had a pregnancy together, even when that pregnancy was miscarried or aborted, could mark a commitment between the young women and their partner. This commitment is strengthened with a subsequent pregnancy and by the young women's positive and encouraging approach to the father's involvement to the growing family.

A DESIRE FOR MARRIAGE

Despite a contributing and supportive partner, and effective and creative family formation, some of the young women, notably the ones with children, voiced a desire for marriage. Both Sandra and Danielle-who had children over a year old and were in a long-term supportive relationship-expressed a desire to marry and live with their partner:

Interviewer: So where do you see your future with [partner!, or your future generally?
Sandra: Where do I see ... hopefully, hopefully right about now our relationship's perfectly fine; we're working on it and everything, no rush, no nothing. Hopefully my future will still be the same ... keep having kids.
Interviewer: So you'd like more children?
Sandra: Yeah.
Interviewer: Okay.
Sandra: Hopefully he puts the ring on it ... hopefully ... but for now it's great.
Interviewer: So do you guys have plans for the

> Danielle: We don't know, we've not really thought ahead like that. About anything. I keep on saying I want to get engaged, get a ring. But he keeps on saying yeah, maybe.

Cadeen also discussed marriage with her baby's father despite acknowledging that their relationship seemed to be breaking down: "He's planning to marry me apparently. His mum wasn't supposed to tell me but she told me. He was supposed to engage me before he went to university, but because his mum told me, he wanted it to be a surprise."

Carol Smart observed that some couples in her research were not happy with the idea of allowing commitment to emerge over years as it was seen as risky. They felt that their relationship might not survive long enough without some kind of external support. For them, the ceremony and the vows of the marriage ceremony were like an "external adhesive to help them bond the long-term relationship they wanted" (Smart 74). Perhaps the young women I interviewed, a year or so into motherhood, also felt this uncertainty and desired marriage as a binding contract for their relationships. The public commitment of marriage can bring less fear of abandonment.

I further suggest that by expressing a desire for marriage and consequently adhering to normalized expectations for committed relationships and family living, the young mothers assured wider society of their good citizenship, despite their "transgression" in becoming a teenage parent (Kidger 490). Judi Kidger has explored peer education in which teenage mothers went into classrooms to discuss the realities of being a teenage mother (488). The intention was to speak of both positive and less positive aspects of teenage parenthood. Despite the opportunity to tell of the good parts of being a mother, the young mothers stressed how it would have been better to wait until they were older and established in the workplace before starting a family. As such, they perpetuated social norms for delayed motherhood and ensured their role of good citizen by promoting these norms, despite the opportunity to give a more honest account. Consequently, this hid certain positive truths of their lives.

This situation reflects Deborah Lupton and John Tulloch's exploration of narratives of self-improvement and self-control that are "mediated through discourses, or social and cultural frameworks of understanding" (115). Teenage pregnancy and parenthood are viewed negatively in society, with parallel assumptions of single parenthood and financial dependence on the state. I suggest that the young mothers in my study were keen to offer socially acceptable narratives of marriage and nuclear family living to counter these judgments. These narratives may have been shaped by prevailing societal moral and ethical values and have been offered as a way of reassuring the research audience that they were "good citizens" and not feckless single teenage parents.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this chapter, I have explored how the young women's narratives demonstrated how parenthood can be a catalyst for positive change in their partner's life, prompting engagement with work and leaving gangs. I have highlighted how the young women presented the "good father," describing his day-to-day involvement in their lives. I have suggested this "assets" (Dollahite et al.) approach was an astute approach by the young mothers that encouraged the continued involvement of their partner in their lives for the future. I have also explored the young women's effective family formations, through apprenticeship, extended family support, and visiting relationship. Despite a creative challenge to the stereotypical nuclear family model, all the young mothers expressed a desire for marriage and living as a nuclear family unit. Practical considerations to ensure their partner's continued support may be a contributing factor to this goal. However, I have also suggested that these narratives appear to be actively mobilized in order to resist the stereotype of the feckless single teenage mother. Unfortunately, as a consequence, celebrating how their lives are demonstrating new ways of showing commitment and being a family is stymied.

ENDNOTE

[1]The young women's names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

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